Asimov's Sherlockian Limericks

by ISAAC ASIMOV

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by Isaac Asimov

UNDOUBTEDLY, the greatest detective of literature and the most famous person who ever lived, Sherlock Holmes, will survive even this cannibalization by one of the most brilliant men—and shameless humorists—of our age: Isaac Asimov.

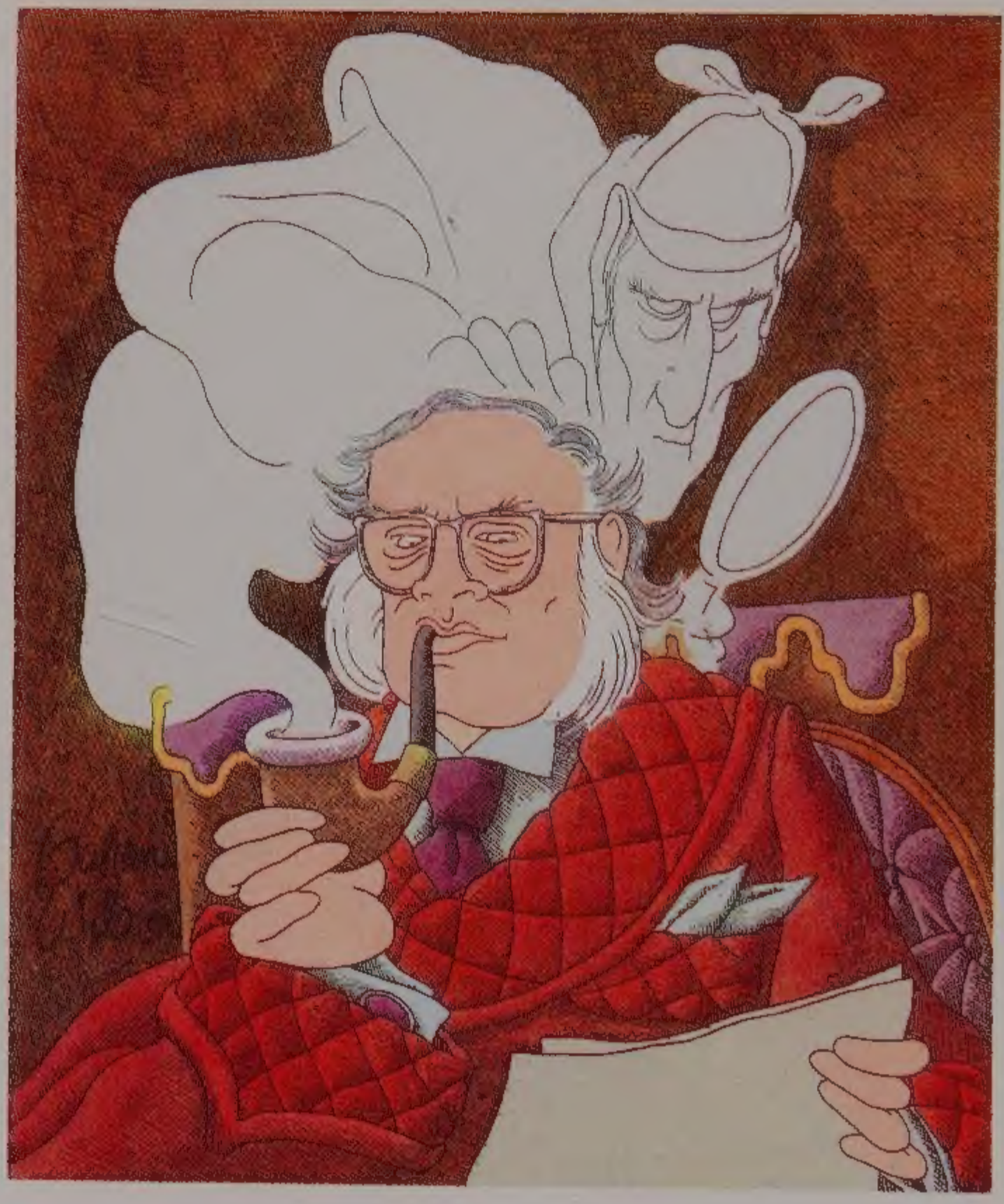
In addition to his prolific science fiction and scholarly works, Asimov is famous (infamous, some would say) for his limericks (he has, somehow, published three volumes of them) and his long association with Holmes (among Baker Street Irregulars, he is referred to as "The Remarkable Worm Unknown to Science").

There are sixty stories about the legendary detective and each immortal tale serves as the inspiration for an outrageous limerick by the best (well, worst, if the truth be told) punster and rhymer known to Western Man.

Gahan Wilson, the pre-eminent illustrator of the bizarre and macabre, is the only artist who would agree to have anything to do with this collection.

Dust jacket illustration by Gahan Wilson

Asimov's Sherlockian Limericks



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by ISAAC ASIMOV

Introduction by the author

Frontispiece by Gahan Wilson

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FIRST EDITION

Dedication:

To the Year of my Mother's Birth
—1895

Introduction

THE LIMERICK has become rather a specialty of mine, since this is my fourth book of them (and the first to be entirely respectable). In this one, I present sixty limericks, one for each of the sixty Canonical tales of Sherlock Holmes.

A limerick is a five-line poem, with a rhyme scheme: a, a, b, b, a. The first, second and fifth lines have three feet each, with each foot an anapest (dih-dih-DAH). The third and fourth lines have two feet each, with each foot an anapest. The rhymes may consist of a stressed syllable only, or of a stressed syllable followed by one unstressed syllable, or even two.

The most frequently repeated limericks are bawdy. Your true connoisseur would find a non-bawdy limerick to be rather

like a non-sweet watermelon, and my other limericks do not stumble into this error.

Limericks based on the Sherlockian Canon must, at all costs, however, imitate the severe respectability of that late-Victorian production. Anything else would be utterly unthinkable and even a mere breath of the scandalous would mean I would never again be able to look Dr. Watson in the eye, or bear the weight of his frank and manly disapproval.

One warning. I do not attempt, in-five short lines, to give a precis of the plot of the story. Each story merely *suggests* a limerick. In the case of the first and the last, the introduction and the valediction, it is the entire Canon that suggests one.

Isaac Asimov
New York, 1977

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Asimov's Sherlockian Limericks

A Study in Scarlet

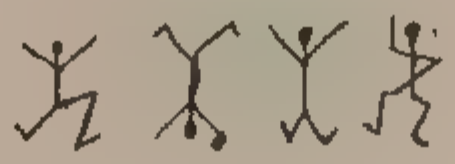
Meet the quick mind that restlessly combs

Through the smallest of clues as it roams

From initial confusion

To triumphant conclusion.

My friends, here we have Sherlock Holmes.



The Sign of the Four

Muttered Holmes, "Never mind cocaine's pleasure.

Let us seek out the famed Agra Treasure."

Answered Watson, "No pearls

For myself—only girls;

And it's Mary that's made to my measure."

A Scandal in Bohemia

The young playboyish king of Bohemia

Has a past that just couldn't be seamier.

But Holmes finds that Irene

Is the best that he's seen.

Even his icy mind's a bit dreamier.

The Red-Headed League

Jabez Wilson, a red-head, grew needier
So he copied the encyclopedia
More for money than fun,
Till a tunnel is done.
Crooks worked quickly, but Sherlock was speedier.

A Case of Identity

Mary Sutherland's bound for the church
But is left by her groom in the lurch.
Quick! To Holmes with the tale
Of that non-show-up male,
And the bloodhound is off on the search.

The Boscombe Valley Mystery

Off to prison McCarthy is packed
For his father's been fat'lly attacked.
Does it mean the chap swings?
"No," says Holmes. "Not a thing's
More deceptive than obvious fact."

The Five Orange Pips

Now to Holmes there come tales of wild deeds,

Eerie warnings on which terror feeds.

Young John Openshaw flips

On receiving five pips—

(But to Yanks they will always be "seeds".)

The Man with the Twisted Lip

Is St. Clair really lost beyond ken?

Was he seen in an opium den?

All the clues point to murder

But the truth is absurder

And Holmes' logic wins out once again.

The Adventure of The Blue Carbuncle

On the goose left behind (fat and fine)

The Peterson fam'ly may dine.

Then they find a large jewel—

But can Sherlock be cruel?

It is Yule! To forgive is divine!

The Adventure of The Speckled Band

The debased Grimsby Roylott can bend

Metal pokers—which Sherlock can mend,

And then move on to net

The ophidian threat

And save the young girl in the end.

The Adventure of
The Engineer's Thumb

Watson finds that this mystery's birth
Is no reason for anyone's mirth
How has Hatherley come
To lose his poor thumb
For a lie that involves fuller's earth.

The Adventure of The Noble Bachelor

The bride's rich and the groom is delighted!

She is gone and the honeymoon's blighted!

Holmes works on with precision

And he then has the vision

Of the U.S. and Britain united.

The Adventure of The Beryl Coronet

Said old Holder to Holmes, "In a kernel,

Though the jewels are back, it's infernal

That there's missing a part.

I suspect my son, Art,

Which is rough on my feelings paternal."

The Adventure of The Copper Beeches

On the ladies, long hair is admired;

So though Violet Hunter's inspired

By the remuneration

Of the new situation,

She tells Holmes—once a bob is required.

Silver Blaze

A bright tale of a dog and a horse

(And there's also a murder, of course)

Which involves the odd fact

That the dog failed to act

Which Holmes found of significant force.

The Yellow Face

Not just murder, but marital bliss,

Offers problems as puzzling as this.

Why should Munro's wife need

Sudden hundreds indeed?

(And, alas, even Sherlock may miss.)

The Stockbroker's Clerk

First young Pycroft has no job, then two,

And that puts him, it seems, in a stew.

First they want him, no doubt

But then Paris is out

It's a puzzle—Does Holmes get the cue?

The "Gloria Scott"

There's embezzlement! Well, transportation
Is the penalty fixed by the nation.
Comes a mut'ny one morning,
And years later, a warning.
—That's young Holmes's first elucidation.

The Musgrave Ritual

What is better for Holmes's detection
Than an ancient and cryptic direction?
Brunton rifles a drawer
In his lust to know more
—But it yields to young Sherlock's dissection.

The Reigate Squires

Doctor Watson—physician dictator—

Orders Holmes to vacation chez Hayter.

But will Holmes fail to pry

When there's murder near by?

No, Holmes acts; he will not wait for later.

The Crooked Man

Who had gotten in through the French door
And then left Barclay dead in his gore?
Sherlock wondered what creature
Could have left the strange feature
Of those puzzling paw-prints on the floor.

The Resident Patient

Mr. Blessington has a physician

To keep watch on his heart's bad condition.

But the doctor fears harm,

Consults Holmes in alarm—

For wild panic, sans cause, brings suspicion.

The Greek Interpreter

Who would dream that our Holmes has a brother?

That with one such quick mind, there's another

That would be even keener

Were but Mycroft much leaner.

It's his indolence lets that mind smother.

The Naval Treaty

Poor old Phelps faces prospects of doom
And yet all he can do is to fume.
The pact's gone—he was sentry—
There's no sign of an entry
But our Holmes can decode the locked room.

The Final Problem

Moriarty! Good God, how it galls
That he lasts through the closest of calls.
And when Holmes meets that prime
Vile Napoleon of crime,
Both men die (?) at the Reichenbach Falls.

The Hound of the Baskervilles

With the corpse of Sir Charles, there was found
The dread prints of a gigantic hound.
The old Baskerville curse
Drives each heir to the hearse—
With his best job, Holmes' saga is crowned.

The Adventure of The Empty House

Holmes' sad death was an ending dramatic.

Watson mourns in a manner emphatic.

But just wait! Can it be?

Who's that bookman I see?

Watson faints—and he then is ecstatic.

The Adventure of The Norwood Builder

The Yard's case here is one of the best.

John McFarlane has all but confessed.

It's too much, Sherlock fears,

For a thumbprint appears

That John made, it seems, *after* arrest.

The Adventure of
The Dancing Men

Those queer cryptic stick figures of men

Have a message worked out by Holmes, when

A sad gangsterish past

Brings us murder at last

From Chicago's vast underworld den.

The Adventure of
The Solitary Cyclist

To her train, Violet is en route

And a man with a beard's in pursuit.

He abandons the race

And is gone without trace.

Holmes deduces—and boxes, to boot.

The Priory School

In comes Huxtable—falls down insensible.

To restore young Saltire's indispensible.

There's a wild, rolling moor

Where the tracking is poor

And Holmes finds ducal ways reprehensible.

The Adventure of
Black Peter

At a butcher's shop, Holmes takes a dig

With a spear at the corpse of a pig.

Run it through at a blow?

The clear answer is, No!

The harpooner who comes, though, is *big*.

The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton

C. A. M. is the worst man uncaged;

Decent men who meet him are enraged.

He has blackmailing letters

All involving his betters.

But what's this? Sherlock Holmes is *engaged*?

The Adventure of The Six Napoleons

To appease some insatiable lust,

There's a man who apparently must,

(It disturbs poor Lestrade,

Even Holmes thinks it's odd)

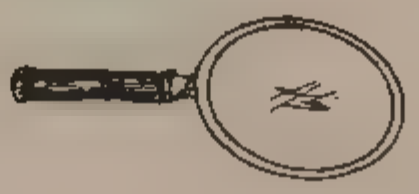
Keep destroying the Emperor's bust.

The Adventure of The Three Students

Sherlock Holmes is annoyed at the cheek
Of a troubled young tutor of Greek
Bringing no confrontations
And no deep machinations,
Just exams—and an illicit peek.

The Adventure of The Golden Pince-Nez

Stanley Hopkins is taken aback
With a problem that's too hard to crack,
For a slain secretary
Has him in a quandary.
But all's well; Holmes is on the attack.



The Adventure of The Missing Three-Quarter

What's become of the missing collegian

Who has vanished in murkiness Stygian?

Though there seems little trace,

Holmes sets out on the chase

And revives Rugby-joys Cantabrigian.

The Adventure of The Abbey Grange

Sherlock Holmes gets impatient with fame.

Crime degenerates, that is his claim.

So he deals, quite unwilling,

With Sir Eustace's killing,

And the down-under source of his dame.

The Adventure of The Second Stain

Holmes is needed as never before.

England's highest are shaken and sore.

There's a document gone

With much hanging thereon.

If it isn't retrieved, it means—war!

The Valley of Fear

Moriarty again! He inspires

Constant evil; he just never tires.

Through informers, Holmes hears of it;

Gets to work, with no fears of it;

And then quenches the criminal fires.

The Adventure of
Wisteria Lodge

John Scott Eccles sought peace down in Surrey;

But while resting, he found only worry.

Dead (but why? no idea!)

Is his young host, Garcia.

John sees Holmes in a very great hurry.

The Adventure of The Cardboard Box

Two fresh ears are received in the mail.

At the sight, all who view it turn pale.

A poor practical joke?

Or some dead hacked-up bloke?

It's the latter, says Holmes, without fail.

The Adventure of The Red Circle

Just who is this mysterious lodger?

Never seen, he's a slippery dodger.

Watson, Holmes, and a mirror

All should make the thing clearer.

But what's this? It's no bearded old codger!

The Adventure of
The Bruce-Partington Plans

Mycroft Holmes is a thinking machine,

But just what can this mystery mean?

Sherlock's mind must be jogged—

The dead clerk, late befogged,

Has the plans for the new submarine.

The Adventure of
The Dying Detective

Catastrophic! The great Holmes is dying.

Doctor Watson is desp'rately trying

To protect his old friend

From a terrible end.

(Can it be the detective is lying?)

The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax

Sherlock won't forsake London to crime.

He puts Watson to work this one time.

Watson almost got mauled,

So he must be recalled,

But then Holmes' efforts, too, are not prime.

The Adventure of
The Devil's Foot

Holmes needs rest (he has never been lazy).

Cornish horrors intrude; things are hazy.

It is surely not clear—

Brenda's murdered, we fear,

And her brothers have now gone quite crazy.

His Last Bow

World War One's at its very beginning,

And the web that Von Bork has been spinning

Leaves one item still sought,

Which, now, Altamont's brought—

Despite Holmes, can the Germans be winning?

The Adventure of
The Illustrious Client

Baron Gruner's a monster of lust,

Yet he charms every girl. How unjust!

This fiend's gathering such as

Violet in his clutches.

Sherlock Holmes will protect her. Have trust!

The Adventure of The Blanched Soldier

Godfrey Emsworth's a friend of Jim Dodd
Boer soil both together have trod.
Now Jim looks ghastly pale
And his house is his jail.
Sherlock Holmes must explain this, by God.

The Adventure of The Mazarin Stone

Holmes is often the crooks' would-be prey!
With the Crown Diamond missing this day,
They are gunning for him.
He's not safe, life or limb,
Yet he sends Doctor Watson away!

The Adventure of
The Three Gables

There's a large Black (a boxer named Steve)

And a mother with reason to grieve.

Why do crooks want her dwelling?

(A good price, if she's selling.)

They've evil, Holmes knows, up their sleeve.

The Adventure of The Sussex Vampire

There's a beautiful wife from Peru

Whose behavior has Bob in a stew.

He tells Holmes that she's wild;

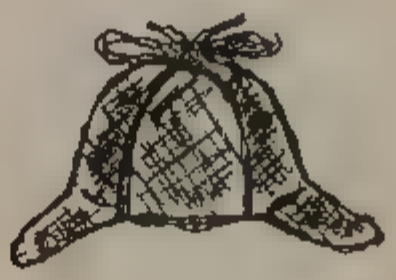
That she's bitten their child.

Can it be we've a vampire in view?

The Adventure of The Three Garridebs

Sherlock hears a peculiar recital.

If the name, Garrideb, is your title,
You can get lots of dough!
Were there something to show
That two others are so-named—That's vital!



The Problem of
Thor Bridge

Holmes' new client's a Yankee tycoon.

He arrives badly needing a boon.

His helpmeet's been found dead

With a shot in her head.

And the suspect he plans to wed soon.

The Adventure of The Creeping Man

The professor is soon to be wed,

But since Prague, all that's been normal has fled.

What will Sherlock Holmes say

To a box locked away,

And a loving dog biting instead?

The Adventure of
The Lion's Mane

Though retired, Holmes is still finding work.

Has a schoolmaster gone quite berserk?

Left Macpherson to die?

And his dog? The reply

May yet rest with a strange marine quirk.

The Adventure of The Veiled Lodger

In a harem, a girl wears a veil;

But in England, what might it entail?

With a beast, altercation

Must mean death, mutilation.

This makes even Holmes' iciness fail.

The Adventure of
Shoscombe Old Place

Robert Norberton's deeply in debt

So he needs every pound he can get.

Holmes depends, with tranquility,

On a dog's sure nobility,

Gets his clue from Bob's sister's loved pet.

The Adventure of
The Retired Colourman

Farewell, Sherlock! Farewell, Watson, too.

First to last, you've been loyal and true.

Of the human totality

Who've lived in reality

There've been none quite as real as you.

Isaac Asimov

ONE OF THE MOST VERSATILE WRITERS ever to savage a typewriter, Dr. Isaac Asimov is also one of the most prolific. *Asimov's Sherlockian Limericks* will be the 189th book in his active career—the fourth book of limericks but his first dealing with Sherlock Holmes. A devotee of the Great Detective, Asimov is a member of the Baker Street Irregulars with the investiture of "The Remarkable Worm Unknown to Science".

While he is perhaps best known for his science fiction works, winning two Hugo Awards of the Science Fiction Writers of America (his *Foundation Series* was selected as the best all-time series), his non-fiction works have become standard reference guides in a variety of subjects ranging from religion to Shake-

speare to mathematics to pure sciences. More recently, he has turned to the pleasures of detective fiction and created such memorable characters as Darius Just (for *Murder at the ABA*) and The Black Widowers (for *Tales of the Black Widowers* and *More Tales of the Black Widowers*).

When asked to explain his ability to produce an endless stream of first-rate writing, Asimov stated simply, "I love to write"; when asked what he would do if he knew he had but six months to live, he replied, "Type faster."

Gahan Wilson

THE MOST DISTINCTIVE CARTOONIST in the world of horror and the macabre, Gahan Wilson's weird artwork first gained notoriety in *Playboy* magazine. He went on to a syndicated series for Sunday newspapers read by 15,000,000 fans, and many books, including *The Weird World of Gahan Wilson* and *Cracked Cosmos*. Wilson has also gained a reputation as a toastmaster of exceptional wit, and has recently devoted considerable time to writing and illustrating successful books for young readers.

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